

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B.A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

RECTOR OF HELMINGHAM, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," &c.

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MDCCCLIX.

MARK XIII. 1-8.

1 And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*

2 And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately;

4 Tell us, when shall these things be? and what *shall be* the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?

5 And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any *man* deceive you:

6 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am *Christ*; and shall deceive many.

7 And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for *such things* must needs be; but the end *shall not be* yet.

8 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

THE chapter we have now begun is full of prophecy,—prophecy of which part has been fulfilled, and part remains to be accomplished. Two great events form the subject of this prophecy. One is the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent end of the Jewish dispensation. The other is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the winding up of the state of things under which we now live. The destruction of Jerusalem was an event which happened only forty years after our Lord was crucified. The second coming of Christ is an event which is yet to come, and we may yet live to see it with our own eyes.¹

Chapters like this ought to be deeply interesting to every true Christian. No history ought to receive so much of our attention as the past and future history of the Church of Christ. The rise and fall of worldly empires are events of comparatively small importance in the sight of God.

¹ I think it right to repeat here what I said in commenting on the report of our Lord's prophecy given by St. Matthew, respecting the destruction of Jerusalem. I believe that in the prophecy now under consideration, our Lord had in view a *second* siege of Jerusalem and a *second* tribulation accompanying that siege, as well as the first siege and tribulation when the city was taken by Titus. That such a siege is to be expected, the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah appears to me to be unanswerable proof.

I see no other way of explaining the close connection which appears in the prophecy, between the "affliction" here foretold, and the "coming of the Son of Man in the clouds with power and great glory." To interpret that "coming of the Son of Man," as the coining of the Roman army in judgment on the Jews, appears to me positive trifling with Scripture.

The view that our Lord is prophesying of *two* sieges of Jerusalem, and *two* tremendous tribulations which would fall especially on the Jews, and of His own second coming as an event which would immediately follow the second siege, makes the whole chapter plain and intelligible.

All these events ought to be deeply interesting to believers; and would be especially so to Jewish believers, like the apostles, in whose time the temple was yet standing, the Jewish dispensation not yet put aside, and Jerusalem not yet destroyed.

Babylon, and Greece, and Rome, and France, and England, are as nothing in His eyes by the side of the mystical body of Christ. The march of armies and the victories of conquerors are mere trifles in comparison with the progress of the Gospel and the final triumph of the Prince of Peace. May we remember this in reading prophetic Scripture! “Blessed is he that readeth.” (Rev. i. 3.)

The first thing that demands our attention in the verses before us, is *the prediction of our Lord concerning the temple at Jerusalem.*

The disciples, with the natural pride of Jews, had called their Master’s attention to the architectural splendour of the temple. “See,” they said, “what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”² They received an answer from the Lord very different from what they expected, a heart-saddening answer, and one well calculated to stir up inquisitive thoughts in their minds. No word of admiration falls from His lips. He expresses no commendation of the design or workmanship of the gorgeous structure before Him. He appears to lose sight of the form and comeliness of the material building, in His concern for the wickedness of the nation to which it belonged. “Seest thou,” He replies, “these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be cast down.”

Let us learn from this solemn saying, that the true glory of a Church does not consist in its buildings for public worship, but in the faith and godliness of its members. The eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ could find no pleasure in looking at the very temple which contained the holy of holies, and the golden candlestick, and the altar of burnt offering. Much less, may we suppose, can He find pleasure in the most splendid place of worship among professing Christians, if His word and His Spirit are not honoured in it.

We shall all do well to remember this. We are naturally inclined to judge things by the outward appearance, like children who value poppies more than corn. We are too apt to suppose that where there is a stately ecclesiastical building and a magnificent ceremonial,—carved stone and painted glass,—fine music and gorgeously-dressed ministers, there must be some real religion. And yet there may be no religion at all. It may be all form, and show, and appeal to the senses. There may be nothing to

² It may be well to remark that the temple here spoken of, was, in a certain sense, the third temple in order which had been built at Jerusalem. The first was built by Solomon, and destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The second was built by Ezra and Nehemiah. The third, if it may be so called, was enlarged and almost re-built, about the time of our Lord Jesus Christ’s birth, by Herod. The enormous size of the stones used in building it, and the general magnificence of the whole fabric, are attested not only by Josephus, but by heathen writers.

satisfy the conscience,—nothing to cure the heart. It may prove on inquiry that Christ is not preached in that stately building, and the word of God not expounded. The ministers may perhaps be utterly ignorant of the Gospel, and the worshippers may be dead in trespasses and sins. ‘We need not doubt that God sees no beauty in such a building as this. We need not doubt the Parthenon had no glory in God’s sight compared to the dens and caves where the early Christians worshipped, or that the meanest room where Christ is preached at this day, is more honourable in His eyes than the cathedral of St. Peter’s at Rome.

Let us however not run into the absurd extreme of supposing that it matters not what kind of building we set apart for God’s service. There is no Popery in making a church handsome. There is no true religion in having a dirty, mean, shabby, and disorderly place of worship. “Let all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor. xiv. 40.) But let it be a settled principle in our religion, however beautiful we make our churches, to regard pure doctrine and holy practice as their principal ornaments. *Without* these two things, the noblest ecclesiastical edifice is radically defective. It has no glory if God is not there. *With* these two things, the humblest brick cottage where the Gospel is preached, is lovely and beautiful. It is consecrated by Christ’s own presence, and the Holy Spirit’s own blessing.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses, is *the remarkable manner in which our Lord commences the great prophecy of this chapter.*

We are told that four of His disciples, aroused no doubt by His warning prediction about the temple, applied to Him for further information. “Tell us,” they said, “when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?”

The answer which our Lord gives to these questions, begins at once with a prediction of coming false doctrine and coming wars. If His disciples thought He would promise them immediate success and temporal prosperity in this world, they were soon undeceived. So far from bidding them expect a speedy victory of truth, He tells them to look out for the rise of error. “Take heed lest any man deceive you.—Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ.” So far from bidding them expect a general reign of peace and quietness, He tells them to prepare for wars and troubles. “Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.—There shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.”

There is something deeply instructive in this opening of our Lord’s prophetic discourse. It seems like the key note of what His Church is to expect between His first and second advents. It looks as if it were spe-

cially intended to correct the mistaken views, not only of His apostles, but of the vast body of professing Christians in every age. It looks as if our Lord knew well that man is always catching at the idea of a “good time coming,” and as if He would give us plain notice that there will be no “good time” till He returns. It may not be pleasant to us to hear such tidings. But it is in strict accordance with what we read in the prophet Jeremiah: “The prophets that have been before, prophesied of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him.” (Jer. xxviii. 8, 9.)

Let us learn from our Lord’s opening prediction to be moderate in our expectations. Nothing has created so much disappointment in the Church of Christ, as the extravagant expectations in which many of its members have indulged. Let us not be carried away by the common idea, that the world will be converted before the Lord Jesus returns, and the earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord. It will not be so. There is nothing in Scripture to justify such expectations. Let us cease to expect a reign of peace. Let us rather look for wars. Let us cease to expect all men to be made holy by any existing instrumentality, schools, missions, preaching, or anything of the kind. Let us rather look for the rise of Antichrist Himself. Let us understand that we live in a day of election, and not of universal conversion. There will be no universal peace till the Prince of Peace appears. There will be no universal holiness till Satan is bound. It may cost us much to hold such opinions as these. But there is not a church or congregation on earth, whose state does not show that these opinions are true, and that while “Many are called, few are chosen.” It may bring on us the unkind remarks and the unfavourable judgment of many. But the end will prove who is right and who is wrong. For that end let us wait patiently. Let us labour, and teach, and work, and pray. But let it not surprise us if we find our Lord’s word strictly true: “Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. v. 14.)

MARK XIII. 9–13.

9 But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.

10 And the Gospel must first be published among all nations.

11 But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in

that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

12 Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against *their* parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

13 And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

IN reading the prophecies of the Bible concerning Christ's Church, we shall generally find judgment and mercy blended together. They are seldom all bitter without any sweet,—seldom all darkness without any light. The Lord knows our weakness and readiness to faint, and has taken care to mingle consolations with threatenings,—kind words with hard words, like warp and woof in a garment. We may remark this throughout the book of Revelation. We may see it all through the prophecy we are now considering. We may note it in the few verses which we have just read.

Let us observe, in the first place, *what troubles our Lord bids His people expect between the time of His first and second comings*. Trouble, no doubt, is the portion of all men, since the day that Adam fell. It came in with the thorns and thistles. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." (Job v. 7.) But there are special troubles to which believers in Jesus Christ are liable, and of these our Lord gives them plain warning.

They must expect trouble *from the world*. They must not look for the help of "rulers and kings." They will find their ways and their doctrines bring them no favour in high places. On the contrary, they will often be imprisoned, beaten, and brought before judgment seats as malefactors, for no other reason than their adherence to the Gospel of Christ.

They must expect trouble from *their own relations*. "Brother shall betray brother to death, and the father the son." Their own flesh and blood will often forget to love them, from hatred to their religion. They will find sometimes that the enmity of the carnal mind against God, is stronger than even the ties of family and blood.

We shall do well to lay these things to heart, and to "count the cost" of being a Christian. We must think it no strange thing if our religion brings with it some bitter things. Our lot, no doubt, is cast in favourable times. The lines of a British Christian are fallen in pleasant places. We have no reason to be afraid of death or imprisonment, if we serve Christ. But, for all that, we must make up our minds to endure a certain proportion of hardship, if we are real, thorough, and decided Christians. We

must be content to put up with laughter, ridicule, mockery, slander, and petty persecution. We must even bear hard words and unkindness from our nearest and dearest relations. The “offence of the cross” is not ceased. The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” They that are “born after the flesh” will persecute those that are “born after the Spirit.” (1 Cor. ii. 14. Gal. iv. 29.) The utmost consistency of life will not prevent it. If we are converted, we must never be surprised to find that we are hated for Christ’s sake.

Let us observe, in the second place, *what rich encouragement the Lord Jesus holds out to His persecuted people*. He sets before them three rich cordials to cheer their souls.

For one thing, He tells us that “the Gospel must first be preached among all nations.” It must be, and it shall be. In spite of men and devils, the story of the cross of Christ shall be told in every part of the world. The gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Notwithstanding persecution, imprisonment, and death, there never shall be wanting a succession of faithful men, who shall proclaim the glad tidings of salvation by grace. Few may believe them. Many of their hearers may continue hardened in sin. But nothing shall prevent the Gospel being preached. The word shall never be bound, though those who preach it may be imprisoned and slain. (2 Tim. ii. 9.)

For another thing, our Lord tells us, that those who are placed in special trial for the Gospel’s sake, shall have special help in their time of need. The Holy Ghost shall assist them in making their defence. They shall have a mouth and wisdom which their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay or resist. As it was with Peter and John and Paul, when brought before Jewish and Roman councils, so shall it be with all true-hearted disciples. How thoroughly this promise has been fulfilled, the histories of Huss, and Luther, and Latimer, and Ridley, and Baxter, abundantly prove. Christ has been faithful to His word.

For another thing, our Lord tells us that patient perseverance shall result in final salvation. “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Not one of those who endure tribulation shall miss his reward. All shall at length reap a rich harvest. Though they sow in tears, they shall reap in joy. Their light affliction, which is but for a moment, shall lead to an eternal weight of glory.

Let us gather comfort from these comfortable promises for all true-hearted servants of Christ. Persecuted, vexed, and mocked as they are now, they shall find at length they are on the victorious side. Beset, perplexed, tried, as they sometimes are, they shall never find themselves entirely forsaken. Though cast down, they shall not be destroyed. Let them possess their souls in patience. The end of all that they see going

on around them is certain, fixed, and sure. The kingdoms of this world shall yet become the kingdoms of their God and of his Christ. And when the scoffers and ungodly, who so often insulted them, are put to shame, believers shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.³

³ There is a promise in the passage now expounded which is often much perverted. I allude to the implied promise contained in the words,—“Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that time, that speak ye.”

The perversion I mean, consists in supposing that this passage warrants ministers in getting up to preach unprepared every Sunday, and in expecting special help of the Holy Ghost in addressing regular congregations, when they have neither meditated, read, nor taken pains about their subject.

A moment’s reflection must show any reader, that such an application of the passage before us is utterly unjustifiable. The passage has no reference whatever to the regular Sabbath sermon of a minister, and only holds out the promise of special help in special times of need.

It would be well for the Church if this was more remembered than it is. At present it may be feared this promise is not unfrequently made an excuse for ministerial idleness, and undigested sermons. Men seem to forget, when they enter the pulpit, that what costs nothing is worth nothing, and that the “foolishness of preaching” and foolish preaching, are widely different things.

MARK XIII. 14–23.

14 But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains:

15 And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter *therein*, to take any thing out of his house:

16 And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.

17 But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

18 And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.

19 For *in* those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the

creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.

20 And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

21 And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here *is* Christ; or, lo, *he is* there; believe *him* not:

22 For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if *it were* possible, even the elect.

23 But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.

WE are taught in these verses *the lawfulness of using means to provide for our own personal safety*. The language of our Lord Jesus Christ on the subject is clear and unmistakeable: "Let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains:—let him that is on the house-top not go down into the house:—let him that is in the field not turn back again:—pray ye that your flight be not in the winter." Not a word is said to make us suppose that flight from danger, in certain circumstances, is unworthy of a Christian. As to the time prophesied of in the passage before us, men may differ widely. But as to the lawfulness of taking measures to avoid peril, the teaching of the passage is plain.

The lesson is one of wide application, and of much usefulness. A Christian is not to neglect the use of means, because he is a Christian, in the things of this life, any more than in the things of the life to come. A believer is not to suppose that God will take care of him, and provide for his wants, if he does not make use of means and the common sense which God has given him, as well as other people. Beyond doubt he may expect the special help of his Father in heaven, in every time of need. But he must expect it in the diligent use of lawful means. To profess to trust God, while we idly sit still and do nothing, is nothing better than enthusiasm and fanaticism, and brings religion into contempt.

The word of God contains several instructive examples on this subject, to which we shall do well to take heed. The conduct of Jacob, when he went to meet his brother Esau, is a striking case in point. He first prays a most touching prayer, and then sends his brother a carefully arranged present. (Gen, xxxii. 9-13.) The conduct of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib came against Jerusalem, is another case. "With us," he tells the people, "is the Lord our God, to fight our battles." And yet, at the same

time, he built up the walls of the city, and made darts and shields. (2 Chron. xxxii. 5.)—The conduct of St. Paul is another case. Frequently we read of his fleeing from one place to another, to preserve life. Once we see him let down from the walls of Damascus by a basket. Once we hear him telling the soldiers on board the Alexandrian corn ship, “Except the shipmen abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” (Acts xxvii. 31.) We know the great apostle’s faith and confidence. We know his courage and reliance on his Master. And yet we see that even he never despised the use of means. Let us not be ashamed to do likewise.

One thing only let us bear in mind. Let us not rest upon means while we use them. Let us look far beyond them to the blessing of God. It is a great sin to be like Asa, and seek not to the Lord but to the physicians. To use all means diligently, and then leave the whole event in the hand of God, is the mark at which a true believer ought to aim.

We are taught, for another thing, in those verses, *the great privileges of God’s elect*. Twice in the passage our Lord uses a remarkable expression about them. He says of the great tribulation, “Except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He hath chosen, He hath shortened the days.” He says again of the false Christs and false prophets, that they “shall show signs and wonders, to deceive, if it were possible, the elect.”

It is plain from this, and other passages in the Bible, that God has an elect people in the world. They are those, according to the seventeenth article of our church, whom “He has constantly decreed by His counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation; those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and decreed to bring by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour.” To them, and them only, belong the great privileges of justification, sanctification, and final glory. They, and they only, are “called by the Spirit in due season.” They, and they only, “obey the calling. They are made sons of God by adoption. They are made like the image of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. They walk religiously in good works, and at length, by God’s mercy, attain to everlasting felicity.” To them belong the precious promises of the Gospel. They are the bride, the Lamb’s wife. They are the Holy Catholic Church, which is Christ’s body. They are those whom God especially cares for in the world. Kings, princes, noblemen, rich men, are all nothing in God’s eyes, compared to His elect. These things are plainly revealed in Scripture. The pride of man may not like them. But they cannot be gainsaid.

The subject of election is, no doubt, deep and mysterious. Unquestionably it has been often sadly perverted and abused. But the misuse of truths must not prevent us from using them. Rightly used, and fenced

with proper cautions, election is a doctrine “full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort.” Before we leave the subject, let us see what these cautions are.

For one thing, we must never forget that God’s election does not destroy man’s responsibility and accountability for his own soul. The same Bible which speaks of election, always addresses men as free agents, and calls on them to repent, to believe, to seek, to pray, to strive, to labour. “In our doings,” most wisely says the seventeenth article, “that will of God is to be followed, which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.”

For another thing, let us never forget that the great thing we have to do, is to repent and believe the Gospel. We have no right to take any comfort from God’s election, unless we can show plain evidence of repentance and faith. We are not to stand still, troubling ourselves with anxious speculations whether we are elect or not, when God commands us plainly to repent and believe. (Acts xvii. 30. 1 John iii. 23.) Let us cease to do evil. Let us learn to do well. Let us break off from sin. Let us lay hold on Christ. Let us draw near to God in prayer. So doing, we shall soon know and feel whether we are God’s elect. To use the words of an old divine, we must begin at the *grammar school* of repentance and faith, before we go to the *university* of election. It was when Paul remembered the faith, and hope, and love of the Thessalonians, that he said, “I know your election of God.”⁴ (1 Thess. i. 4.)

⁴ The meaning of the “abomination of desolation,” in this passage, has always perplexed the commentators. The most common view undoubtedly is, that it signifies the Roman armies, who executed God’s judgment on the Jewish nation.

It may be questioned whether this interpretation completely fulfils the prophecy. I venture, though with much diffidence, to suggest that a more complete and literal accomplishment yet remains to come. The remarkable words of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, appear to me scarcely to have received yet a complete fulfilment: “He, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thess. ii. 4.) I own that it seems to me by no means improbable that a personal antichrist, yet to be revealed at Jerusalem, may prove the final accomplishment of these words. I desire to avoid dogmatism on the subject. I only suggest it as a possible and probable thing.

MARK XIII. 24–31.

24 But in those days after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light,

25 And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken.

26 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

27 And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.

28 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near:

29 So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, *even* at the doors.

30 Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.

31 Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.

THIS part of our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives is entirely unfulfilled. The events described in it are all yet to take place. They may possibly take place in our own day. The passage therefore is one which we ought always to read with peculiar interest.

Let us observe, in the first place, *what solemn majesty will attend our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming to this world*. The language that is used about the sun, moon, and stars, conveys the idea of some universal convulsion of the universe at the close of the present dispensation. It reminds us of the apostle Peter's words, "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." (2 Pet. iii. 10.) At such a time as this, amidst terror and confusion, exceeding all that even earthquakes or hurricanes are known to produce, men "shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."

The second coming of Christ shall be utterly unlike the first. He came the first time in weakness, a tender infant, born of a poor woman in the manger at Bethlehem, unnoticed, unhonoured, and scarcely known. He shall come the second time in royal dignity, with the armies of heaven around Him, to be known, recognized, and feared, by all the tribes of the earth. He came the first time to suffer, to bear our sins,—to be reckoned a curse,—to be despised, rejected, unjustly condemned, and slain. He shall come the second time to reign,—to put down every enemy beneath his feet,—to take the kingdoms of this world for His inheritance, to rule them with righteousness, to judge all men, and to live for evermore.

How vast the difference! How mighty the contrast! How startling the comparison between the second advent and the first! How solemn the thoughts that the subject ought to stir up in our minds! Here are *comfortable* thoughts for Christ's friends. Their own King will soon be here. They shall reap according as they have sown. They shall receive a rich reward for all that they have endured for Christ's sake. They shall exchange their cross for a crown.—Here are *confounding* thoughts for

Christ's foes. That same Jesus of Nazareth, whom they have so long despised and rejected, shall at length have the preeminence. That very Christ, whose Gospel they have refused to believe, shall appear as their Judge, and helpless, hopeless, and speechless, they will have to stand before His bar. May we all lay these things to heart, and learn wisdom!

Let us observe, in the next place, that *the first event after the Lord's second coming, shall be the gathering of His elect*. "He shall send His angels and gather together His elect from the four winds."

The safety of the Lord's people shall be provided for, when judgment falls upon the earth. He will do nothing till He has placed them beyond the reach of harm. The flood did not begin till Noah was safe in the ark. The fire did not fall on Sodom till Lot was safe within the walls of Zoar. The wrath of God on unbelievers shall not be let loose till believers are hidden and secure.

The true Christian may look forward to the advent of Christ without fear. However terrible the things that shall come upon the earth, his Master will take care that no harm comes to him.—He may well bear patiently the partings and separations of this present time. He shall have a joyful meeting, by and bye, with all his brethren in the faith, of every age, and country, and people, and tongue. Those who meet in that day, shall meet to part no more.—The great gathering is yet to come. (2 Thess. ii. 1.)

Let us observe, in the next place, *how important it is to note the signs of our own times*. Our Lord bids His disciples "learn a parable of the fig-tree." Just as its budding leaves tell men that summer is near, so the fulfilment of events in the world around us, should teach us that the Lord's coming "is nigh, even at the doors."

It becomes all true Christians to observe carefully the public events of their own day. It is not only a duty to do this, but a sin to neglect it. Our Lord reproved the Jews for "not discerning the signs of the times." (Matt. xvi. 3.) They did not see that the sceptre was passing away from Judah, and the weeks of Daniel running out. Let us beware of falling into their error. Let us rather open our eyes, and look at the world around us. Let us mark the drying up of the Turkish power, and the increase of missionary work in the world. Let us mark the revival of Popery, and the rise of new and subtle forms of infidelity. Let us mark the rapid spread of lawlessness and contempt for authority. What are these things but the budding of the fig-tree? They show us that this world is wearing out, and needs a new and better dynasty. It needs its rightful king, even Jesus. May we watch, and keep our garments, and live ready to meet our Lord! (Rev. xvi. 15.)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *how carefully our Lord asserts the certainty of His predictions being fulfilled*. He speaks as though He foresaw the incredulity and scepticism of these latter days. He warns us emphatically against it:—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."

We ought never to allow ourselves to suppose that any prophecy is improbable or unlikely to be fulfilled, merely because it is contrary to past experience. Let us not say, "Where is the likelihood of Christ coming again? Where is the likelihood of the world being burned up?" We have nothing to do with "likely or unlikely" in such matters. The only question is, "what is written in God's word?" The words of St. Peter should never be forgotten: "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, saying, where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.)

We shall do well to ask ourselves, what we should have thought, if we had lived on earth two thousand years ago. Should we have thought it more probable that the Son of God would come on earth as a poor man and die, or that He would come on earth as a King and reign? Should we not have said at once, that if He came at all, He would come to reign and not to die? Yet we know that He did come as "a man of sorrows," and died on the cross. Then let us not doubt that He will come the second time in glory, and reign as a King for evermore.

Let us leave the passage with a thorough conviction of the truth of every jot of its predictions. Let us believe that every word of it shall prove at last to have been fully accomplished. Above all, let us strive to live under an abiding sense of its truth, like good servants ready to meet their master. Then, whatever be the fulfilment of it, or however soon, we shall be safe.⁵

⁵ I am aware that some interpreters of the passage now expounded, explain its language very differently from myself. Many regard the "sun, moon, and stars" as emblems of kings and rulers, —the "coming of the Son of Man," as a general expression signifying any great exhibition of divine power,—and the "sending forth of His angels," as nothing more than the sending of ministers and messengers of the Gospel to gather together the people of God.

I will only say that I can see no ground or warrant for such interpretations. They appear to me to be a dangerous tampering with the plain literal meaning of Scripture, and to give a great handle to the Arian, and Socinian, and the Jew, in the arguments that they respectively bring forward in support of their own peculiar views.

I take this opportunity of expressing my decided opinion, that the word "generation" in the verse, "this generation shall not pass away," can only mean "this nation or people,—the Jewish nation, —shall not pass away."

The view that it means the "generation of men which is alive now while I am speaking," would make our Lord to say that which was not true. His words were in no sense completely fulfilled when the generation to which He spoke had passed away.

The view that it means “the same generation which is alive when these things begin, shall also see them accomplished,” appears to me untenable for one simple reason. It is not the natural meaning of the Greek words, from which our translation is made.

MARK XIII. 32–37.

32 But of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

33 Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

34 *For the Son of man is* as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man

his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35 Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning:

36 Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37 And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

THESE verses conclude St. Mark's report of our Lord's prophecy on the Mount of Olives. They ought to form a personal application of the whole discourse to our consciences.

We learn from these verses, that *the exact time of our Lord Jesus Christ's second advent is purposely withheld from His church*. The event is certain. The precise day and hour are not revealed. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven."⁶

⁶ There is undoubtedly some difficulty in the words of our Lord, "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son." The question has often been raised, "How can the Lord Jesus be ignorant of anything, since He is very God, and says Himself, "I and my Father are one?" How can the expression be reconciled with the saying, 'In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge?'" (Col. 2, 3.)

The answer to these questions is to be found in our deep ignorance of the great mystery of the union of two natures in one Person. That our Lord Jesus Christ was at the same time perfect God, and perfect man we know. That these two distinct natures were both found together in His Person, we also know. But how, and in what way, and to what extent the divine nature did not always operate in Him so as to overshadow the human nature, I believe it to be impossible for mortal man to explain.—Enough for us to know that we sometimes see in our Lord's words and actions, the "man Christ Jesus," and sometimes see the "God over all blessed for ever." But though we see clearly, and admire, we cannot explain. We can only say, in the present instance, that our Lord spake as a man, and not as God.

Bullinger, in an able note on the subject, gives an interesting quotation from Cyril, of which the following passage is a portion:

"Just as the Saviour was willing to endure hunger, and thirst, and other sufferings of this kind, so also, as man, He is ignorant of "that great day." For He sometimes speaks as God, and sometimes as man, in order that He may show Himself to be both very God and very man. As God He said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," when no one had told Him. As man He asked the sister of Lazarus, when He came to them at the end of His journey, "Where have ye laid him?" He who, when far off, knew that Lazarus was dead, how could He be ignorant, when present, of the place where the body of Lazarus was? It is utterly improbable that He should have known the one thing, and been ignorant of the other. But the truth is, that He knew both as God, while He was ignorant of both as man. Therefore, in the same way, He both knew not and yet knew "that day and that hour." As man He knew not. As God He knew."

It is a sensible remark of Gualter, that pressing an excessively literal interpretation of texts like this, is the sure way to revive old heresies, and to bring into doubt, sometimes the divine, and sometimes the human nature of Christ.

There is deep wisdom and mercy in this intentional silence. We have reason to thank God that the thing has been hidden from us. Uncertainty about the date of the Lord's return is calculated to keep believers in an attitude of constant expectation, and to preserve them from despondency. What a dreary prospect the early church would have had before it, if it had known for certain that Christ would not return to earth for at least fifteen hundred years! The hearts of men like Athanasius, Chrysostom, and Augustine, might well have sunk within them, if they had been aware of the centuries of darkness through which the world would pass, before their Master came back to take the kingdom.—What a quickening motive, on the other hand, true Christians have perpetually had, for a close walk with God! They have never known, in any age, that their Master might not come suddenly to take account of His servants. This very uncertainty has supplied them with a reason for living always ready to meet Him.

There is one caution connected with the subject, which must not be overlooked. We must not allow the uncertainty of the time of our Lord's second advent to prevent our giving attention to the unfulfilled prophecies of Scripture. This is a great delusion, but one into which, unhappily, many Christians fall. There is a wide distinction to be drawn between dogmatical and positive assertions about dates, and a humble, prayerful searching into the good things yet to come. Against dogmatism about times and seasons, our Lord's words in this place are a standing caution. But as to the general profitableness of studying prophecy, we can have no plainer authority than the apostle Peter's words: "Ye do well that ye take heed to prophecy;" and the apostle John's words in Revelation: "Blessed is he that readeth." (2 Peter i. 19. Rev. i. 3.)

We learn, in the second place, from these verses, *what are the practical duties of all true believers in the prospect of the second coming of Jesus Christ*. Our Lord mentions three things, to which His people should attend. He tells them plainly that He is coming again one day, in power and great glory. He tells them at the same time, that the precise hour and date of that coming are not known. What then are His people to do? In what position of mind are they to live? They are to watch. They are to pray. They are to work.

We are to *watch*. We are to live always on our guard. We are to keep our souls in a wakeful, lively state, prepared at any time to meet our Master. We are to beware of anything like spiritual lethargy, dulness, deadness, and torpor. The company, the employment of time, the society which induces us to forget Christ and His second advent, should be marked, noted, and avoided. "Let us not sleep as do others," says the apostle, "but let us watch and be sober." (1 Thess. v. 6.)

We are to *pray*. We are to keep up habits of regular communion and intercourse with God. We are to allow no strangeness to come in between us and our Father in heaven, but to speak with Him daily; that so we may be ready at any moment to see Him face to face. Moreover, we are to make special prayer about the Lord's coming, that we may be "found in peace, without spot and blameless," and that our hearts may at no time be "overcharged" with the cares of this life, and so the day come upon us unawares. (2 Peter iii. 14. Luke xxi. 34.)

Finally, we are to *work*. We are to realize that we are all servants of a great Master, who has given to every man his work, and expects that work to be done. We are to labour to glorify God, each in our particular sphere and relation. There is always something for everyone to do. We are to strive each of us to shine as a light,—to be the salt of our own times,—to be faithful witnesses for our Master, and to honour Him by conscientiousness and consistency in our daily conversation. Our great desire must be to be found not idle and sleeping, but working and doing.⁷

Such are the simple injunctions to which our Lord would have us attend. They ought to stir up in the hearts of all professing Christians great self-examination. Are we looking for our Saviour's return? Do we long for His appearing? Can we say with sincerity, Come, Lord Jesus? Do we live as if we expected Christ to come again? These are questions which demand serious consideration. May we give them the attention which they deserve!

Does our Lord require us to neglect any of the duties of life, in the expectation of His return? He requires nothing of the kind. He does not bid the farmer neglect his land, or the labourer his work, the merchant his business, or the lawyer his calling. All He asks is that baptized people should live up to the faith into which they were baptized,—should live as penitent people,—live as believing people,—live as people who know that "without holiness no man can see the Lord."—So living, we are ready to meet our Master. Not living in this way, we are neither fit for death, judgment, nor eternity. To live in this way is to be truly happy, because it is to be truly prepared for anything that may come upon the earth. Let us never be content with a lower standard of practical Christianity than this. The last words of the prophecy are peculiarly solemn: "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"

⁷ "Be doing something," says Jerome, "that the devil may always find you engaged."—It was a common saying of Calvin, towards the end of his life, when his friends would have had him do less work, for his health's sake, "would you have my Master find me idle?"